Contractor L. S. Wagner - Part 5

This final column will share information about more of the buildings that L. S. Wagner erected more than 100 years ago. It will also be shared who his final business partner was and how long that partnership lasted.

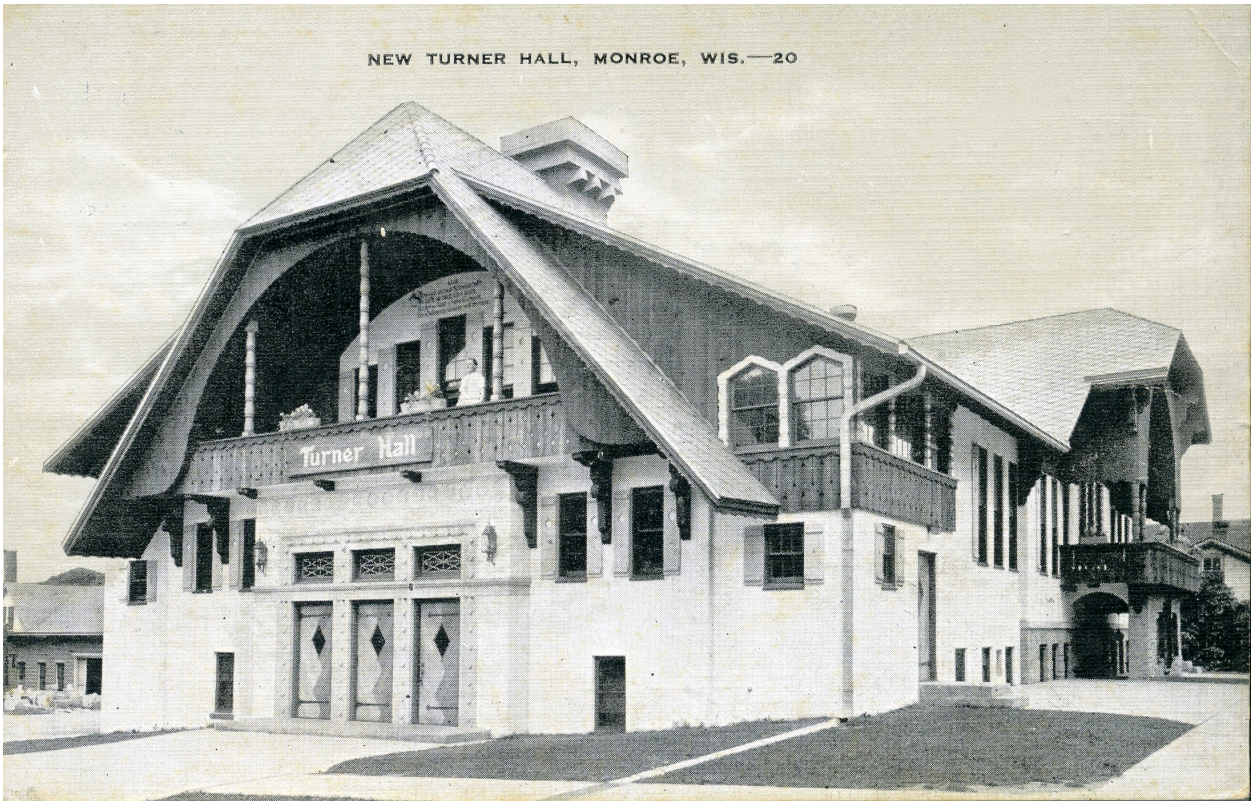
A large ad appeared in the July 30, 1921 Times that Emil F. Bauman had some property for sale and had "decided to leave Monroe." Just more than two years earlier, E. F. and Jennie Bauman had sold half interest in about 237 acres in Sections 13, 14, and 24 in Jordan Township to L. S. Wagner.

It was about this time that Lewis formed a company with his son, Francis, called L. S. Wagner & Son; they maintained offices above the Trukenbrod drug store on the east side of the Square in 1922.

It was announced in October 1923 that this firm had been awarded the contract for building the new Juda High School, which was to be completed by the following fall. It was to be of brick and tile, two stories tall with a basement, and "modern in every detail." The Wagner bid was $49,980, not including the heating system.

The same firm was awarded the contract for the new $130,000 high school in Mineral Point in March 1924 with work to start as soon as the weather permitted. The Wagner firm, at that time, was "just completing work on the fine Fennimore public library." The following February they "were the successful bidders for the new library and municipal building at Boscobel" with the lowest bid of $42,945.

It was announced on May 17, 1926 that Wagner's old white brick house, a rental property, on the southwest corner of 17th Avenue and 8th Street was to be torn down on Wednesday and "replaced by a modern two-story brick house." Wagner went to Milwaukee for building materials for this house; it was here that his Willys Knight automobile was struck and totally wrecked on August 3 when it was struck by an interurban car about a mile out of Waukesha. He had been traveling from Jefferson to Milwaukee about 6:00 p.m. Fortunately, he was only scratched from broken glass.



After the original Turner Hall burned on September 6, 1936, L. S. Wagner & Son was awarded the contract to build the current building. This is a copy of a postcard from the collection of the late Marv Rufi. Notice that this was before the bowling alley was added.

The 1927 city directory shows that Lewis and Kittie had moved into this house, at 801 17th Avenue, from their residence next door to the west. He would live the rest of his life in this house, but the house number eventually changed to 803.

This summarizes the early years of L. S. Wagner's buildings up to 100 years ago. Lewis and Francis continued to operate as L. S. Wagner & Son until Lewis retired in the early 1940s, with Francis then continuing the business under the same name.

An article on January 7, 1946 stated that Lewis, now 81 years old, "made his usual downtown appearance today for the first time in 10 weeks" after being confined to his home due to a hip injury received in a fall. "He escaped without fracture and gained 7 pounds in weight while laid up." On August 5, 1947 the Times shared that he had "returned to his home where he is enjoying rest after having been confined to St. Clare hospital for three weeks," having been admitted as a medical patient.

Lewis passed away at St. Clare hospital on July 24, 1951 having been admitted only five days earlier. Kittie continued to live in the home until the following year when she moved to Prairie du Sac to be near her daughter, Mrs. Peter (F. Margaret) Meng. Francis then moved to Middleton by 1953, but was still operating the contracting business. The firm was "constructing additions to [the] East and South school buildings and the new school in Hollandale" at the time that Lewis died. His obituary also said that the firm had built the new addition to the high school and the new Turner Hall.

Francis operated the business in Monroe for about two years after his father's death and then operated from his home in Middleton. Francis passed away in Florida on September 28, 1965, three years after having retired and moving there. He left a son and a daughter and two grandchildren. Florence passed away in Lodi in 1983; it is unknown if she left any descendants.

L. S. Wagner and his partners left a legacy in Monroe and beyond with many of their buildings still standing, some of them for more than 100 years. The three-story former IOOF building housed the post office from October 9, 1916 until it moved to the current building on February 6, 1933. The former Immanuel Evangelical Church building has served the community for 110 years. The former apartment building that Wagner built in 1917 at 824 17th Avenue housed Eileen's Hair Fashions on the main floor for many years and is currently being remodeled; there are also two one-bedroom apartments upstairs. The Green County Normal School, which opened in January 1922, now serves the City of Monroe as the Behring Senior Center. Grace Lutheran Church was dedicated September 26, 1920 and has been serving our community, with additions and modifications, ever since.

In addition to all of the above named buildings, it is believed that the houses now standing at the following addresses are the ones built by Mr. Wagner: 1314 17th Avenue, 808 17th Avenue, and 803 17th Avenue.

With all that Lewis Sheldon Wagner left for our community (and others), it is my hope that one of his descendants will see these columns and share a photo of him along with more information. Can we be as fortunate as we were with Peter Wells!